

Grey-Bruce

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By: Paulette P., for the Sun Times

Space agency team to take training at Georgian College

Group headed to high Arctic research station taking wilderness first-aid course

The Canadian Space Agency is sending a team of research scientists on a mission to Grey and Bruce.

The space agency team is taking a three-day wilderness first-aid course at Georgian College in Owen Sound. It's part of the college's Wilderness Experience Certificate Programme.

"There's first aid and there's first aid" explained Alain Berinstain, the space agency's director of planetary exploration and space astronomy.

Berinstain's team conducts field research near the North Pole, on remote desert islands that look more like Mars than southwestern Ontario.

In an emergency, you can't just call 911. "Classical first aid is not necessarily all that relevant" there, Berinstain said.

The course will be taught by Dan Kieffer, a paramedic, and Jennifer Khan, both seasoned instructors with Survival in the Bush, Inc. which co-ordinates the Georgian College Wilderness programme. Berinstain said he chose the programme because of its hands-on approach and the reputation of its instructors.

The CSA's planetary exploration and space astronomy team manages national research program with universities across the country. Its focus is space science missions, including NASA's planned mission to Mars this fall which will feature Canadian instruments on board.

"Planetary exploration is relatively new to Canada," said Berinstain.

His team helps to transform experiments on Earth into a form that would work in space. For example, it is growing plants in a greenhouse on Devon Island, the largest uninhabited island on Earth, that may be potential food crops for a base on Mars. The island is located 180 kilometres northeast of Resolute Bay, in the Canadian high Arctic, and has been called a "near-perfect environment" for simulating some of the conditions of Mars.

While the Mars Institute has medical staff available on Devon Island, the Canadian team wants to be prepared in case of an emergency while working there.

"Surprises will happen, but you can hopefully be prepared," said Berinstain.

The CSA team will be arriving from Montreal on April 12 and begin the course after an information reception at the college.